

Danesfort Dispatches

A Quarterly Newsletter from the U.S. Consulate General Belfast

January 2008



Vol. 3, Issue 1

Dear American Community,

My first few months as Consul General in Belfast have been very exciting and productive. The formation of a shared government in Northern Ireland has created new opportunities for the United States to work with government and community leaders on new projects that we believe will further strengthen the ties between our countries.

In early October 2007 U.S. Ambassador to the United Kingdom Robert H. Tuttle and U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Ireland Thomas C. Foley visited Northern Ireland with a delegation of U.S. business representatives. Enterprise, Trade, and Investment Minister Nigel Dodds welcomed the delegation of more than twenty representatives from U.S. firms. The visit was an opportunity for the participants to see what Northern Ireland has to offer including a well-educated workforce, a strong infrastructure and outstanding educational facilities where innovative research and development are already taking place.

I also had the privilege of accompanying First Minister Ian Paisley and Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness on their December visit to the United States. It was the first time they visited the United States together as leaders of the government of Northern Ireland. Their visit to New York focused on trade and economic development. They met the New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, visited the New York Stock Exchange, and NASDAQ. They also had meetings with several U.S. business leaders to encourage them to consider investing in Northern Ireland. While in Washington D.C. the Ministers met with the President's Special Envoy on Northern Ireland, Under Secretary of State Paula Dobriansky, Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez, and Congressional leaders. The successful week culminated in a visit to the Oval Office to meet with President Bush. The President congratulated the Ministers and affirmed U.S. commitment to help Northern Ireland move forward by encouraging U.S. business leaders to take a good look at the economic opportunities in Northern Ireland. We will be working at the Consulate General in the coming months to encourage this positive momentum. Stay tuned!

Susan Elliott

Consul General

Voting Season is Here — Get Out and Vote!

The U.S. elections are in full swing. Now is your time to voice your choice! A full roundup of 2008 Primary Elections for each State can be found online at the Federal Voters Assistance website at <http://www.fvap.gov>.

America.gov - The State Department has launched a new website which includes an great interactive page on the upcoming U.S. elections. Go to <http://www.america.gov> and click on U.S. Politics for more information.

New Website - Another great site for overseas citizens is <http://www.overseasvotefoundation.org>. It offers a wealth of information for U.S. citizens on registering to vote from overseas. It is dedicated to helping overseas citizens and uniformed services register to vote.

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Prepare Early for Spring and Summer Travel

Spring and summer months are peak travel times for many U.S. citizens. Spring Break, St. Patrick's Day and Easter holidays offer great opportunities to travel with family and friends. This can mean an increased demand for U.S. passport services. U.S. citizens requiring consular services are thus requested to plan accordingly and apply for passport services well in advance of their expected travel date. Specifically, if you anticipate requiring passport services from the U.S. Consulate in Belfast this summer, we strongly encourage you to contact us as early as possible to ensure you receive documents and services in time. Remind U.S. citizens family or friends traveling from the U.S. to Northern Ireland to apply as early as possible for their passports. Now is a great time to apply for your U.S. passport, as demand is traditionally lower.

U.S. Passport Fees Change

Beginning February 1, 2008, the Department of State will institute a new fee schedule for passport services. Fees are being adjusted to cover the cost of providing efficient and secure passport services including infrastructure, technology, and staff. Watch for a chart on <http://travel.state.gov> regarding the fee changes. For further information on passport services available at the U.S. Consulate General Belfast, visit our website at <http://london.usembassy.gov/nireland/index.html>.

Children Traveling Without Their Parents Or with One Parent

Adults traveling in or out of the U.S. with children under the age of 18 should be aware that because of increasing incidents of child abductions in disputed custody cases and other crimes against children, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) strongly recommends that unless the child is accompanied by both parents, the accompanying adult should have a notarized document from the child's other parent (or, in the case of a child traveling with grandparents, uncles or aunts, sisters or brothers, or friends, signed by both parents) acknowledging that the wife/husband/etc. is traveling out of the country with the son/daughter and they have permission to do so. An attached copy of parents passport is also useful. While CBP may not ask to see any documentation, if they do ask and you do not have it, you may be detained until the child's circumstances can be fully assessed. If there is no second parent with legal claims to the child (deceased, sole custody, etc.), carrying paperwork such as a court order, birth certificate naming only one parent, death certificate, etc., would be useful.



New Document Requirements Beginning January 31, 2008

Entering the United States by land from Canada or Mexico - Currently, Americans entering or leaving the United States by land from Canada or Mexico may simply declare that they are American citizens and be admitted. Beginning January 31, 2008, the Department of Homeland Security plans to move toward Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) implementation at land and sea ports of entry by ending the routine practice of accepting oral declarations of citizenship alone. Citizens of the United States, Canada, Bermuda, and Mexico will need to present the following to enter or depart the United States by land or sea:

- Ages 19 and older: a government-issued photo ID, such as a driver's license, along with proof of citizenship, such as a birth certificate or naturalization certificate.
- Children ages 18 and younger: proof of citizenship, such as a birth certificate.
- Passports and trusted traveler program cards - NEXUS, SENTRI and FAST - will continue to be accepted for cross-border travel.

The full requirements of the WHTI will be implemented by summer 2008. Additional information can be found at http://travel.state.gov/travel/cbpmc/cbpmc_2223.html or the Department of Homeland Security website at <http://www.dhs.gov/xtrlsec/crossingborders/whtibasics.shtm>.



Spotlight : Passport for Minors - New Regulations

New regulations governing issuance of U.S. passports to minors go into effect on February 1, 2008.

A new regulation extending the two-parent consent and personal appearance requirements to all minors under the age of 16 (the requirements currently apply to minors under the age of 14) takes effect February 1, 2008. This means that from February 1, 2008, minors under age 16 must appear in person at the Consulate General and be accompanied by BOTH parents when submitting an application for a passport. For information about the exceptions to the requirement that both parents consent to passport issuance and attend the U.S. Consulate General, see below.

An appointment must be scheduled in advance. Appointments can be scheduled by telephoning the Consulate General at 02890-386104.

Passport Renewal Application for a Child under 16 Years at U.S. Consulate General Belfast

The following documentation is required in support of the application:

- The child's most recent U.S. passport;

- Completed but unsigned passport application form DS-11.

- Two identical passport photographs; see http://london.usembassy.gov/cons_new/visa/niv/photo.html for specifications.

- Child's certified U.S. or foreign birth certificate listing parent(s) names, or Consular Report of Birth Abroad (Form FS-240) listing parent(s) names, or Adoption Decree listing adopting parent(s) names. If the parent(s) and the child have different surnames, documentation linking the parent(s) to the child (e.g. parent(s) divorce decree and/or subsequent marriage certificate, court orders, etc.) will be required.

- Parent(s) current passports (U.S. or foreign) for purposes of identification.

- The \$85 fee. The fee may be paid in cash (U.S. dollars or sterling) or by credit card (Visa, Mastercard, American Express, Discover or Diners). Personal checks are not accepted.

- A self-addressed, prepaid Royal Mail Special Delivery envelope so the issued passport can be forwarded to the applicant by mail.

- Passport processing takes approximately two weeks.

Exceptions to the two-parent consent and personal appearance requirement are:

- The non-attending parent completes a Form DS-3053 (Statement of Consent) before a notary public.

- The attending parent presents the notarized document together with a copy of non-attending parent's U.S. or foreign passport; or

- The attending parent provides evidence of their sole authority to apply for the passport, i.e., proof that the child was born out of wedlock in the form of the child's U.S. or foreign birth certificate or U.S. Consular Report of Birth Abroad listing only the applying parent, or the child's adoption decree listing only one adopting parent, or a court order granting sole custody to the applying parent.

For further information about the above and all other passport services provided by Consulate General Belfast, please refer to <http://london.usembassy.gov/nireland/nipass.html>.



Social Security Benefits: An Update



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In October last year, the Social Security Administration announced the 2008 increase in benefits. Based on the Consumer Price Index from the third quarter of 2006 through the third quarter of 2007, Social Security beneficiaries will receive a 2.3 percent increase in their benefits. The increase will be reflected in their January 2008 payment.

Social Security also announced that the standard premium for Medicare Part B will rise from \$93.50 to \$96.40 a month. As a reminder, Medicare coverage is only good in the United States. If Medicare Part B premiums are being deducted from your benefits and you do not plan to go back to the United States, then you may want to consider terminating coverage. If you do, please contact the Federal Benefits Unit at the London Embassy at 0207 499 9000, option 2, then option 6, for more information.

Lastly, America's first Baby Boomer, Kathleen Casey-Kirschling filed for benefits. She was born one minute after midnight on January 1, 1946. She is leading what is often referred to as America's silver tsunami. Over the next 40 years, nearly 80 million people will become eligible for Social Security benefit per day which equates to 10,000 a day. To prepare for this wave of new filers, Social Security has developed a wide range of on-line services. As these become available to those overseas, we will let you know.

Federal Benefits: A Common Misconception

There is a common misconception that you have to be a U.S. citizen to be eligible for Social Security benefits.

Over the years, the Social Security Agency has seen individuals who have failed to claim benefits because of this misconception. Most often, the Social Security Agency has identified these individuals when they contact it to report the death of a spouse. Often the Social Security Agency can only pay up to six months of retroactive benefits and, in many cases, not even that much. This failure to file at the first point of eligibility can result in the loss of thousands of dollars in benefits.

Don't let this happen to you. Remember that to be eligible for benefits, you either must have worked in the United States or be married, or have been married, to someone who has worked in the United States. You don't have to be a U.S. citizen. Be smart and go to www.ssa.gov to learn about other eligibility requirements for Social Security benefits or contact the Federal Benefits Unit at Embassy London at http://london.usembassy.gov/cons_new/acs/fbu/index.html or by telephone at 0207 499 9000, option 2, then option 6.

Be Aware - Medicare Scam

Medicare covers medical services performed in the United States.

Recently, some Social Security retirees have been contacted and told that if they enroll in "Ambassador Care" that Medicare will extend its coverage overseas. This is NOT true.

The Social Security Agency believes that Ambassador Care uses a United States address for billing purposes and tries to bill Medicare as if services were performed in the United States. The bottom line is that Medicare does not reimburse for services performed outside the United States. This company is using deceptive practices and has been referred to the Office of Inspector General for possible prosecution. For further information on Medicare go to <http://www.medicare.gov>.



American Citizen Services - FAQ's



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Q. I am a U.S. Citizen resident in the UK and pay UK taxes. If I become a dual national what would my position be regarding filing U.S. tax returns?

All U.S. citizens are required to file annual U.S. income tax returns reporting their world-wide income. If you become a dual citizen, it would not change that requirement. You may not owe any tax due to foreign tax credits but you are still required to file. There are penalties for failure to file returns, and for failure to pay any taxes owed. The failure to pay penalty is 5% per month up to 25% of the amount of unpaid tax due. The failure to file penalty is \$100 for the individual income tax return. For other types of returns it can be more. For more information visit the IRS Section of the U.S. Embassy London website, specifically the page on filing requirements: <http://london.usembassy.gov/irs/irswho.htm>. You can also contact the IRS office at the Embassy by calling 020-7894-0477 between 9:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Foreign Financial Accounts Reporting Requirements

Many U.S. citizens have foreign financial accounts. While there are many legitimate reasons to own foreign financial accounts, there are also responsibilities that go along with owning such accounts. Foreign account owners must remember that they may have to report their accounts to the U.S. Government, even if the accounts do not generate any taxable income.

Who is required to report their foreign accounts to the government, and how do they do so? The Bank Secrecy Act requires U.S. persons who own a foreign bank account, brokerage account, mutual fund, unit trust, or other financial account to file a Form TD F 90-22.1 (see IRS website <http://www.irs.gov/>). Report of Foreign Bank and Financial Authority (FBAR) is required if: *The person has financial interest in, signature authority, or other authority over one or more accounts in a foreign country, and the aggregate value of all foreign financial accounts exceeds \$10,000 at any time during the calendar year.*

The FBAR is not an income tax return and should not be mailed with any income tax returns. The FBAR must be mailed on or before June 30 of the following year to: U.S. Department of the Treasury, P.O. Box 32621, Detroit, MI 48232-0621.

For more information on this and other topics go to the IRS website at <http://www.irs.gov/>.

IRS Scam Warning - Be Vigilant!

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) would like all taxpayers to be aware that they should be on the lookout for tax scams via email, personal mail or phone. Increasingly, scam artists are targeting taxpayers in order to receive money or personal information to use for identity theft.

There are a few recent scams that are fairly widespread. A common email scam tells you that you are owed a refund, but that in order to receive it you must go to the linked webpage and enter your credit card information and social security number. Another email scam is titled "Tax Avoidance Investigation" and asks you to complete an investigation form via link. This link leads to a virus instead. A recent scam by mail (mostly targeting foreign citizens) is titled "Final Amnesty Tax Notification" and asks you to fill out a form with a large amount of personal information and fax it back to them.

There are a few important things to know when on the lookout for a scam. The IRS never sends unsolicited emails to taxpayers, nor do we discuss taxpayer account information over the email. If you owe the IRS money or there is a problem with your return, you will receive a notice through the mail.

The IRS office in the London Embassy offers help to taxpayers and that includes you! Contact them at 0207 894 0477, Monday through Friday, 9:00 am. to Noon or visit their website at <http://london.usembassy.gov/irs/index.htm>.

Register for the Foreign Service Exam



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Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) advocate American foreign policy, protect American citizens, and promote American business interests throughout the world. FSOs staff our Embassies, Consulates and other diplomatic missions devoted to strengthening peace, stability, and prosperity. Their perceptiveness, dedication, and creativity drive the formulation and achievement of American foreign policy objectives. Increasingly, transnational issues such as the environment, science and technology; the global struggle against diseases such as AIDS; international law enforcement cooperation and counter narcotics trafficking; counter proliferation and international action against trafficking in persons have gained stature among American foreign policy objectives. What awaits you in the Foreign Service is the opportunity of a lifetime. You'll get to know foreign languages and cultures while making a difference in the lives of both U.S. and foreign citizens.

The Foreign Service Officer selection process begins with online registration, followed by a written and oral exam, and for those who succeed, culminates in assignment to the A-100 course--the training courses that mark the beginning of every Foreign Service Officer career!

The dates for the upcoming FSO Written test abroad are March 2 – 9, 2008 and June 7-14, 2008. For more information on test registration and a list of available locations overseas to take the test, go to <http://careers.state.gov/officer/register.html>

Information on other State Department jobs can be found at <http://www.state.gov/careers>. Register soon... For the job of a lifetime!!

Tracing Your Family History in Northern Ireland

During the last three centuries hundreds of thousands of people left these shores to seek new lives around the world. Today, many descendants of Ulster migrants are returning to find out more about their roots. If you would like to know about your family and its connection to Northern Ireland the following resources may be helpful. Some may charge a fee for their services.

Belfast City Council website at www.belfastcity.gov.uk/familyhistory/index.asp?menuitem=tracing for details and helpful information on how to trace your family history.

Belfast Family History Centre
This site offers information on family history provided by the Church of Latter Day Saints. For details go to <http://www.discovernorthernireland.com>.

Family Ulster
Family Ulster is a family research and tour service which provides professional genealogical research into individual family trees. Tours of any town, street, church, school, graveyard known to a visitor's ancestors can be arranged. Go to www.familyulster.com.

The Linenhall Library includes a card index to personal names dating back to 1802. Visit www.linenhall.com/genealogyAndHeraldry.asp for more information.

The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI)

PRONI is the official place of deposit for public records in Northern Ireland. It holds millions of documents which relate chiefly, but by no means exclusively, to present-day Northern Ireland. The earliest record dates from 1219, with the main concentration of records covering the period 1600 to the present. The records fall into three general categories:

- Records of Government Departments which in many cases go back to the early nineteenth century;
- Records of courts of law, local authorities and other non-departmental public bodies;
- Records deposited by private individuals, churches, businesses and institutions.

Go to www.proni.gov.uk for more information.

The Ulster Historical Foundation (UHF)

The UHF promotes an interest in Irish history and genealogy, with particular reference to Ulster. UHF offers an ancestral research service for a fee, publishes books, organizes conferences and lecture tours, and runs a membership association, known as the Ulster Genealogical and Historical Guild. Go to www.ancestryireland.com for details.

Increase in U.S. Visa Application Fee



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Effective January 1, 2008, the application fee for a U.S. non-immigrant visa increased from \$100 to \$131. This increase allows the Department to recover the costs of security and other enhancements to the non-immigrant visa application process.

For more information on U.S. Visas Services go to our website at <http://london.usembassy.gov/nireland/nivisa.html>.



Culture Corner



The U.S. Consulate General occasionally provides partial grants for cultural events which have an American element. Some of the events are free, for others there is a charge. This quarter, we encourage you to check out:

Belfast Nashville Songwriters Festival - February 20-24th, 2007 - Now in its 4th year this year's festival brings together talented songwriters and musicians from around the Province and the U.S. More information on this year's lineup and details on how to book tickets available at <http://www.belfastnashville.com>.

American Citizen Services:

In the event of a genuine emergency involving a U.S. Citizen in Northern Ireland, our after hours phone number is 0870 238 5428.

Consular Closure Dates

The U.S. Consulate General will be closed on the following dates:

Monday, February 18, 2008 - President's Day

Monday, March 17, 2008 - St. Patrick's Day

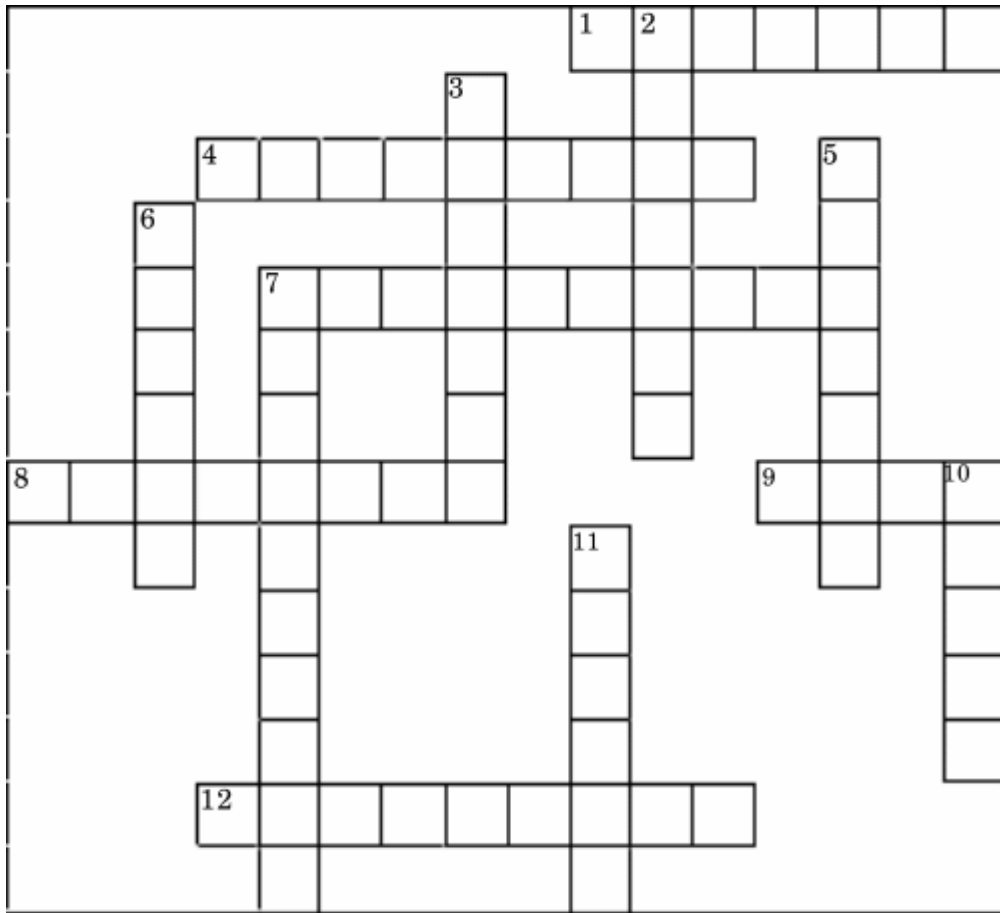
Friday, March 21, 2008 - Good Friday

Monday, March 24, 2008 - Easter Monday

Tuesday, March 25, 2008 - Easter Tuesday

Kids Corner

President's Day



Across

- 1 A major reason for Civil War
- 4 Highest executive office
- 7 President lives here
- 8 Day of your birth
- 9 Cast this to elect president
- 12 Nickname for 16th president

Down

- 2 Was 16th president
- 3 Record of past events
- 5 Right to make choices
- 6 Kind of tree George cut down
- 7 Last name of first president
- 10 In balance
- 11 Silver Coin George threw

Across: 1. Slavery 4. President 7. White House 8. Birthday 9. Vote
 12. Honest Abe. Down: 2. Lincoln 3. History 5. Freedom 6. Cherry 7.
 Washington 10. Equal 11. Dollar.